

"I Know"

GayGremlin

"I Know" by GayGremlin

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Genre: Angst with a Happy Ending, Coming Out, Eddie loves Richie, Getting Together, Homophobia, Internalized Homophobia, M/M, Richie loves Eddie, Secret Relationship, Sonia Kaspbrak is a shitty parent, Sonia Kaspbrak's A+ Parenting, and that's the tea sis, for a little bit though, good parents maggie and wentworth because I'm soft for that shit, i rest my case, like hella angsty but a happy ending so it's gucci, marriage proposal kinda, richie is repressed and that's Big Sad

Language: English

Characters: Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak, Henry Bowers mentioned, Maggie Tozier, Richie Tozier, Sonia Kaspbrak, Wentworth Tozier, the other Losers that I'm too lazy to name

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Summary:

I literally have no idea how to summarize anything, but I will try:

Richie Tozier is gay. He knows this and he hates it. He also knows that he is in love with his best friend, Eddie Kaspbrak. He also hates that. He feels dirty. He feels wrong. And he is determined to never tell anyone his secret, and plans to keep it with him until the day he dies. But that plan goes out the window when his friend Beverly finally confronts him and he spills his heart out to her.

It's the story of coming to terms with his sexuality, getting together with the crush that he thought was completely unattainable, and coming out to his parents through heartfelt conversations, and the horrors of what happens when Sonia Kaspbrak finds a photo strip of

Richie and Eddie kissing.

Y'all, it's 4 a.m., my stomach hurts, and I'm exhausted. I swear the fic is better than it probably sounds.

1. Somebody To Love

Author's Note:

Hola amigos! Your local lesbian here!

Reddie has owned my heart lately, so I'm just here to do my part.

I spent a lot of time on this fic so I hope y'all like it! Leave comments for any sort of feedback you want to give. Any and all feedback is appreciated!

Enjoy my guys! <3

Summary for the Chapter:

Chapter 1 of a fic that took me way too long to write!!

"Each morning I get up I die a little, can barely stand on my feet. I take a look in the mirror and cry, Lord what you're doing to me. I have spent all my years in believing you, but I just can't get no relief, Lord. Somebody, oh somebody, can anybody find me somebody to love? I work hard every day of my life, I work 'til I ache my bones. At the end of the day I take home my hard-earned pay all on my own. I get down on my knees and I start to pray till the tears run down from my eyes, Lord... I just gotta get out of this prison cell. Someday I'm gonna be free, Lord. Somebody, oh somebody, can anybody find me somebody to love?..."

-Queen, "Somebody To Love" (1976)

Life wasn't fair. That was something that Richie Tozier had figured out from a very early age. Some people got dealt shittier hands than others, some from birth and some from how things played out during the duration of their lives. For Richie, it was more of a combination of the two. Or more, he wasn't sure if it was one or the other. It was complicated.

From the outside, it seemed that Richie Tozier had it pretty good. He lived an average middle-class life in an average middle-class home in an average middle-class town. He had two loving parents, good grades, and a good group of friends. He wasn't black, like his friend Mike, and he wasn't a girl, like his friend Beverly. It seemed from an outside perspective that he had been born into a life that predisposed him for success.

But there was a catch.

As he grew older and matured (more physically than mentally, as his friends and family would say), he found himself feeling more and more detached from all the other boys his age. All they wanted to talk about was girls. Which girl in their grade they thought had the biggest tits, who had the prettiest face, who their crush of the week was, or who they had made out with underneath the bleachers or behind the school dumpsters. It seemed to be the only thing that the other boys would ever talk about, and the only thought that ever managed to cross their usually empty heads. Girls, girls, girls, and more girls.

The thing was, Richie never quite understood. He wished he did. He wished more than anything that he could feel what the other boys were feeling, and to think what the other boys were thinking. He just couldn't. He could look at a girl and agree that she was objectively beautiful, but beyond that? Nothing. And it scared the ever-loving shit out of him.

And what scared him even more was that how the other boys would talk about and act around girls, he felt towards boys.

Yeah, Richie Tozier may have seemed to have been dealt a pretty good hand in life, but really... he couldn't have been more terrified of the hand he'd been given.

'At least I can hide it,' he'd think to himself in yet another useless attempt to quell his fears. 'At least people can't see it from looking at me.' But it felt like they could.

He tried to ignore it, he really did. He would crack jokes about girls constantly, how many girls he had slept with, how huge his dick was,

how he fucked Eddie's mom...

Eddie.

Holy fuck.

Richie may or may not have fallen head over heels for the boy. But even if he found practically everything the other boy did to be cute, and his stomach did flips every time he thought of him, and he felt his whole body tingle every time they touched, no one was to know. Especially not Eddie. Being just friends with Eddie could be excruciating at times, yes, but the thought of Eddie being disgusted by him and hating his guts? The mere thought of it made him want to puke.

Although his parents weren't necessarily the most devout of Christians, they still regularly attended church on Sundays just like everyone else in the small town of Derry, Maine (except for their small Jewish population, who were obviously given shit for not following the Christian faith like everyone else). For Richie, Sundays were a day that only served to consume him with confusion, self-hatred, and dread. The priest would tell them that in God's eyes, boys like Richie were disgusting. They were perverts and an abomination to God. They were choosing to live a perverted life style and would not be forgiven unless they changed their ways. They were sick. They were bad. They were different.

Richie had never been a firm believer. Sure, he had gone to church every Sunday since before he could remember and he could recite practically every Bible story by heart, but ever since he started being able to form his own thoughts and opinions, he wasn't too sure about this whole God thing. But once he started to realize his feelings towards other boys, he would pray every Sunday like there was no tomorrow. He just wanted for God to make him normal. He didn't want to see the disgusted looks on people's faces if they were to ever find out about his secret. He didn't want to see his father's look of rage and his mother's look of despair. He didn't want to see his friends abandon him, to call him names and never want to talk to him again.

He knew that if his secret was to ever come to light, he would be

done for. He lived in Derry, for crying out loud. Derry, where hate crimes were justified, everyone still held the same views that were common in the 1930's, and no one wanted anything to do with a queer boy who was just a little too sweet on his best friend. Hell, he wouldn't be surprised if he was killed for it, knowing some of the people in his town. He knew somewhere in the back of his mind that once he was able to leave Derry things might be easier for him, but that thought didn't help much currently. Because at the moment he was 13, almost 14, and nowhere near being able to leave the shithole of a town that he was forced to call home.

The only time that he felt any sort of relief was when he was hanging out with his friends, who had deemed themselves the "Loser's Club". They spent almost everyday after school together and had a group sleepover practically every Saturday night (usually switching between Richie, Ben, and Bill's houses). The seven of them were as close as friends could get, and Richie would do literally anything for them. But he would never tell them this, of course. He didn't want their egos getting too big, after all. So he showed his affection through the only way he knew how: shitty jokes and insults.

"Whatcha thinkin' about, Rich?" he heard Bev call to him, startling him back into the present. It was a cool autumn day, and the seven of them were riding their bikes down the leaf-covered, suburban streets of Bill's neighborhood as they headed towards the Barrens to hang out in the underground clubhouse that Ben had built.

"Nothin' much, just thinkin' about how I'm gonna do Eddie's mom later!" he responded immediately. Classic Richie.

"You're a dickwad, and if I could hit you right now I would," he heard Eddie call from where he was riding his bike behind him, obviously irritated. Classic Eddie.

The others liked to say that the two of them bickered like an old married couple. Oh, if they only knew... Richie shook his head. He laughed. Although he couldn't see Eddie's face, he knew for a fact that he was pouting.

"Do it, coward!" he shouted back, to which Eddie responded with a yell of "You're a piece of shit, Tozier!"

Richie just gave a hearty laugh, knowing that there really wasn't any malice behind Eddie's words. They bickered like this all the time. It was a staple of their friendship, and they wouldn't have it any other way (much to the annoyance of Mrs. Tozier, who had to put up with them far too often).

The others just rolled their eyes at their antics. They were far too used to it at this point. In all the years that the group had been friends (Richie, Bill, Eddie, and Stan longer than Mike, Ben, and Bev of course), this had always been how the relationship between Richie and Eddie was, and how they assumed it would always be. Despite their bickering, their friends knew deep down that the two shared a strong bond, possibly stronger than what they had with any of the other Losers.

Soon enough the group had biked all the way to the Kissing Bridge, where they would get off their bikes, stow them under the bridge, and head down a small trail, almost concealed completely with vegetation, that led into the forest and to the clubhouse. Laughing and chattering away, they dismounted their bikes and stashed them in their usual spot. But Richie hesitated, though just momentarily.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the place where he had painstakingly carved the initials "R + E" into the wooden siding of the bridge. It had only been a month or so ago when he had done that, and only around three days after the run-in with Henry Bowers at the arcade.

Bowers' words still haunted him, stinging like salt on an open wound whenever he thought of them, and making him want nothing more than to shrivel up and die on the spot.

'...You assholes didn't tell me that your town was full of a bunch of fairies...'

'...Richie fucking Tozier? A fairy?...'

'...Get out of here faggot!...'

'...Fucking MOVE!...'

"Richie, dude, you c-c-coming?" Bill's voice came from below. He had just finished securing his bike so that it wouldn't tumble into the fast-moving creek that ran under the bridge. The others had already started down the trail, with Eddie chatting animatedly with Beverly, his eyes glowing happily and his smile beaming.

Damn, Richie really was whipped, huh.

Pulling himself back, he nodded and flashed his friend a grin. "Sure thing Big Bill!" he called back, hauling his bike down the steep but short path from the road to the creek. Bill smiled good-naturedly in return and began up the trail with Richie once he was done dealing with his bike, both of them jogging to catch up with their friends.

Soon enough they were all settled in at the clubhouse. Of course, settled in by Richie and Eddie's standards meant fighting over the hammock until they each relented and laid uncomfortably squashed in it together. They were all wearing the brightly colored shower caps that Stan had brought, besides Richie, stating that he "wasn't a pussy"... Meaning that Eddie wasn't wearing a showercap either.

Conversation flowed from one topic from another, Richie giving his input practically every 5 seconds ("Do you ever shut up, Richie?") while leafing through one of the old comic books that he had brought down a while ago. However, he wasn't really all too focused on its contents. He was more preoccupied with the boy sitting practically on top of him, how warm he was, how his face looked when he laughed and how his eyes sparkled when he glanced over at Richie.

"Richieeeee," he whined, smacking the other boy's face with his socked foot. Richie slapped his foot away playfully.

"Yes, m'lady?" he replied in his awful imitation of a British accent. Eddie glared at him in equal playfulness and smacked him with his foot again, earning a faint "what did I do?" from the other.

"You're closer to my fanny-pack," Eddie told him, his laughter subsiding. Richie looked over his shoulder to see Eddie's small fanny-pack sitting on the ground where it had been flung during their battle over the hammock. Richie smirked.

"What, you want me to give it to you?" he asked innocently. Eddie groaned. He knew this would happen.

"Dude, just give my my fucking fanny-pack, I need my pills," he insisted irritatedly. Richie just smirked.

"You're gonna have to say the magic words, Eddie Bear," he cooed in his best imitation of Mrs. Kaspbrak.

"Oh my god Richie, shut up-" And they were off again. Soon enough, they were in a full-fledged tickle fight, with Eddie writhing underneath Richie in a fit of giggles, almost flinging them both out of the rather small hammock with every jerk.

"Stop it!" Eddie shouted in between bouts of joyful laughter.

"Never!" Richie declared, laughing as well. The others had moved on with conversation, giving the pair affectionate eye rolls and even a flip of the finger (courtesy of Stanley). After being around the two for so many years, they had learned how to tune them out when they needed.

'Don't touch the other boys, Richie.'

Richie froze. A voice, sounding eerily like the clown that the seven of them had fought just over a month earlier, taunted softly in his mind, almost as if it were being whispered in his ear.

'Don't touch him, or he'll know. He'll know and he'll hate you, Richie, him and everyone else.'

"Chee?" Eddie started apprehensively, his eyes suddenly full of concern for his friend. "You okay there?" Shaking his head hastily, he shifted on the hammock so that he wasn't lying directly on top of the other. Looking around, he saw that the others were giving him quizzical, concerned looks as well. He laughed, trying to ease the tension.

"Oh yeah, sorry Eds," he said, a tad louder than he intended, flashing his friend a trademark Richie Tozier grin. "Just got a cramp in my side, had to take a breather. I can't be out of commission for your mom, she's expecting me tonight." This earned him an exasperated

kick in the side from the other, both for the usage of the nickname "Eds" and for the mention of fucking his mother.

Richie knew that it was a flimsy excuse, but it was the best that he could come up with on the spot. Suppressing his feelings had only become increasingly difficult with the passing of time, especially over the past few months. Not only were his hormones going absolutely batshit bonkers, he had also indulged himself in his guilt-ridden secret more than he knew he should have. He had let himself find any acceptable reason to touch Eddie, he had let himself lie awake at night fantasizing about him, hell, he had even carved their initials into the fucking Kissing Bridge for christ's sake!

He was so whipped. And so fucked.

Richie lay in bed that night with a heavy heart. This had become common enough by that point though. His turmoil, his guilt, his fear, and his anger all lingered in the back of his mind during the day, not quite something he dwelled on but never something that left him, never something that let him have peace of mind. But at night, there were no distractions. It was him and his thoughts against the world, or more accurately, the world and his thoughts against himself.

Rolling over onto his side with a heavy sigh, he stared aimlessly at the wall opposite his bed. His poster of The Clash that hung there looked like nothing more than a blurry splotch from the darkness that shrouded his room and the fact that his glasses were lying uselessly on his bedside table. He knew that it must have been the early hours of the morning at this point, perhaps 2 a.m., but he couldn't for the life of him will himself to fall asleep. This was also a common occurrence. Falling asleep meant dreaming, and dreaming meant either A: reliving the horrors that they all endured with It, B: having nightmares about horrible things happening to him when everyone finds out about his secret and the shit hits the fan, or C: having... interesting... dreams about Eddie that he'd rather not think about or discuss (these dreams riddled him with guilt and disgust, of course). So no, he put off falling asleep for as long as he possibly could.

But even avoiding sleep would do no good. Lying in bed, he could only think about what his parents would think, what the town would think, what his friends would think, and most importantly, what

Eddie would think. Would his parents kick him out? Would the town shun him? Would his friends hate him? Would Eddie be revolted by him? Would he get beat up with even more vigor? Hell, would he be killed? He didn't know and he was terrified. People would think he was a pervert, they would say that he was going to get "that gay disease" ("if he doesn't have it already"). They would tease him mercilessly. He would lose everything.

He would never let anyone know. He would keep it to himself until the day he died. He was determined to do so. He would marry a nice girl, maybe have a kid or two. He had to. He didn't want to, but he had to. It didn't matter that he could care less about the curves of a girl's body or the pitch of her voice or anything else that the other boys couldn't seem to shut up about. It didn't matter that he would catch himself far too often staring at the toned stomachs of other boys, and not just in admiration. It didn't matter that he thought that their defined jaw lines were to die for, or that he had a few rather risque magazine cut-out images of River Phoenix hidden under his mattress.

It didn't matter that whenever he was asked about his "dream girl" he could only manage to think of his best friend, his bright smile, dark hair, petite stature, and witty comebacks.

He used to try to force himself to be normal, to convince himself to like girls. He was far past that point by now. He was resigned to the fact that he was somehow defective and there was nothing he could do about it, nothing his parents could do about it, and hell, maybe even nothing God could do about it. He hadn't exactly gotten back to Richie on his ceaseless praying yet.

No one was going to know.

R + E stood for Rachel and Ethan, or Ricky and Emily. Not the names of two boys.

Eddie was going to stay an unattainable fantasy, a fantasy that Eddie was never going to know about.

Never.

Never ever.

Well, the shit finally hit the fan around 3 and a half years after this particular night that Richie Tozier lay awake hating the world and hating himself, and it did so in a way that he could never have imagined.

2. Eddie My Love, How Will I Know?

Summary for the Chapter:

Chapter 2!

Richie has a heartfelt coming out to Beverly :).

Feedback is pretty gucci, so if you have some that would be awesome!

I hope you enjoy <3

“Eddie, my love, I love you so. How I’ve waited for you, you’ll never know. Please, Eddie, don’t make me wait too long. Eddie, please write me one line. Tell me your love is still only mine. Please, Eddie, don’t make me wait too long... All I do is cry myself to sleep, Eddie, since you’ve been gone. Eddie, my love, I’m sick in bed, the very next day might be my last. Please, Eddie, don’t make me wait too long...”

-Teen Queens, “Eddie My Love” (1957)

“There’s a boy I know, he’s the one I dream of. Looks into my eyes, takes me to the clouds above. Oh, I lose control, can’t seem to get enough. When I wake from dreaming, tell me is this really love? Oh, how will I know? Don’t trust your feelings. How will I know? Love can be deceiving. How will I know if he really loves me? I say a prayer with every heartbeat. I fall in love whenever we meet. I’m asking you what you know about these things. How will I know if he’s thinking of me? I try to phone, but I’m too shy, can’t speak. Falling in love is so bittersweet. This love is strong, why do I feel weak?...”

-Whitney Houston, “How Will I Know” (1985)

Richie Tozier was now 16 years old, right on the cusp of turning 17. He was still tall and lanky, but had filled out well enough over the years. He still wore the same coke-bottle glasses and his hair was still as unruly as ever. His jokes had only gotten all the more creative (or in Eddie's words, "unbearable"), and he was still decidedly the most

annoying of the seven Losers. But now he could play electric guitar, so at least he had that going for him.

Oh, and he got a boyfriend.

And he couldn't believe his luck, because it was Mr. Wet Dream himself, Eddie Kaspbrak.

It had been during a Losers Club sleepover around 10 months prior that they had finally gotten together, and Richie could not have been more ecstatic.

The seven of them had all gotten together at Bill Denbrough's house after a long summer day filled with splashing around in the quarry and buying as much candy as they could fit in their pockets at the convenience store. After watching 2 shitty movies, throwing copious amounts of popcorn at each other, and eating a nauseating amount of pizza, it was 1 a.m. and they were running out of ideas on what to do.

So Bev, wonderful, mischievous, absolutely awful Bev, decided that a couple rounds of Truth Or Dare was the way to go.

Of course, Richie knew what she was up to immediately. Bev was the only one in his life that knew. Richie hadn't even meant for her to know, but now she did, and she was taking every measure possible to try to push him and Eddie together.

The way that he had come out to Bev was pathetic to say the least. Or at least he thought so. But Bev told him that he was merely reacting the way anyone would. He couldn't decide which of them was right.

It had been at yet another Loser's Club sleepover about a month and a half before the one at Bill's place. Bev had gone out to the back patio of Ben Hanscome's house to "smoke a fag" (she would say this in her best imitation of a British accent, making Richie cackle while the others groaned. She had learned from the master after all). Richie had gone with her, saying that he had run out of cigarettes the week before, and Bev had offered to share.

It had been pleasant outside. The night was cool and a light breeze rustled the leaves of the trees in the Hanscome's backyard. Bev and Richie had sat down lazily in the lawn chairs underneath the covered patio, passing a cig back and forth between the two of them.

"Hey, Rich?" Bev had asked after sitting in a comfortable, companionable silence for a minute or so.

"Yeah?" a relaxed Richie had responded, blowing the smoke out of his nose with a light sigh and passed the cigarette back to his friend. She paused for a moment, hesitating with a faint look of unease. Then she turned to look him in the eyes with an expression so genuine that it caught Richie off guard.

"What's-"

"I know you're hiding something," she said suddenly. Richie froze. What? What did she mean? Did he do something wrong? What was this all about?

Her eyes widened momentarily, realizing how accusatory she had sounded.

"I mean....," she started again hastily, lowering her gaze almost guiltily, but only for a moment. "I can tell. I can tell there's something that's eating you up. I've been able to tell for the past few years. There's something making you miserable. And I'm worried."

Richie felt as though his whole body had been dunked in ice. Was he really that obvious? Had she figured it out? Did she know his secret? Did she hate him? Was she going to tell everyone? Was she disgusted? Did she-

"Richie!" he heard her whisper-yell urgently, snapping her fingers in front of his face, making him jolt out of his spiralling thoughts with a start. She chuckled, sounding relieved. "Dude, you looked like you were gonna pass out there for a second." He chuckled uneasily in response, shifting uncomfortably in the wooden lawn chair. A moment of silence passed between them.

"Richie, what's wrong?"

She said it so softly and with such genuine love and concern that Richie immediately burst into tears, surprising both of them. Beverly immediately sprung out of her own chair and knelt before Richie's, pulling him into a bone-crushing hug. She rubbed his back in slow, soothing circles as he wept, heaving wet, ugly sobs that wracked his entire body.

"It's okay, Richie," she whispered soothingly into his ear as he lay his head on her shoulder, hands clinging to the fabric of her shirt as if his life depended on it. "It's going to be okay."

"No it's not!" was all he could make out in between heavy sobs and gulping breaths, his words slightly muffled by the fabric of Bev's shirt. He was shaking horribly and he was starting to feel lightheaded. He hadn't cried like this in quite a few years, and he definitely couldn't remember a time when he cried like this in front of another person. "It's not o-o-okay!" He heard as well as felt her sigh, her chest rising and falling against his.

"What's not okay, Richie?" she asked quietly. He only sobbed harder, trying in vain to take deep, gulping breaths.

"I-I can't! I can't like- I can't-" he was crying so hard that he could barely get the words out. He was surprised that he hadn't woken up the entire neighborhood at that point. "I'm not supposed to like boys!"

He didn't quite register what he had just admitted until Beverly gasped and loosened her grip on him ever so slightly. He froze, jerking himself back into an upright sitting position from where he had been bent over to hug his friend, looking square into Beverly's shocked eyes. Oh no, oh god no. He wasn't ever going to let anyone know this, he was going to take it with him to the grave! Holy fuck, what did he just do?!

"I-I-" he started, wanting nothing more than to take back his words. God dammit, he was so fucking stupid! "I-I'm sorry Bev, I didn't mean- I'm not-"

"Richie, it's-"

"I'm sorry, just forget I said anything, I won't do anything faggy I

swear, just please-"

"Dude-"

"Please don't tell anyone, they'll kill me, I'm sorry, please don't hate me, I-"

"Richie!"

He stopped, his face as pale as parchment and showing nothing less than pure fear and panic. Though he wanted nothing more than to focus on anything else, he couldn't manage to look away from the eyes of his... friend? Would she still be his friend? Would she hate him? Would she tell the others? Would she tell his parents? Would she tell anyone at school? Would she-

"Richie, it's okay."

To say that he wasn't expecting that reaction would be an understatement. He felt as if he had been hit with a bolt of lightning, his whiplash was so bad. She wasn't... mad? Scared? Disgusted? Hateful? She looked even... understanding.

"W-what?" he asked in a quiet, timid voice that was completely unlike him and would have completely thrown Beverly off in any other circumstance. His eyes were still red and puffy, his tears had left stains down his cheeks, and he was still sniffling and hiccuping almost uncontrollably, but he wasn't crying anymore. (Frankly, he had been terrified so bad that the tears had basically been scared out of him.) She gave him a small, lopsided smile, simultaneously both kind and sad. Sighing, she pulled him into another embrace, hugging his head into her shoulder and burying her face in his dark, curly locks. He embraced her back in equal strength.

"Thank you for telling me," she told him in a whisper, and she meant it. She had been shocked, yes, but not mad. She could never be mad at anyone for that, especially not Richie. He was her friend, and she was going to be there for him no matter what. He only sniffled in response. "I still love you, ya know." He paused at this, but soon nodded slowly, his head still in the crook of her neck. "And for the record, I don't think there's jack shit wrong with bein' queer. There's

just too many assholes in the world." This pulled a snort out of her friend, and she breathed out a laugh as well.

Richie pulled away, looking more sheepish than she'd ever seen him. He wasn't used to opening up to anyone. Hell, he was embarrassed. But he also felt... relieved. Like a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He had told someone (unintentionally, but it had still happened), and they hadn't immediately turned on him or spit in his face. They actually accepted him. They were proud of him!

However, only moments later (and much to Richie's dismay), a sly grin grew on his friend's face. "So," she started, a mischievous glint in her eye that Richie didn't much like the looks of. "Who's the lucky fella?" He groaned, slumping dramatically back into his seat as Beverly cackled and stood from where she had been crouched awkwardly on the ground at the foot of his chair. She sat back down in her own chair, giving a slight grunt as her ass hit the wooden seat. She snubbed the butt of their shared cigarette in the ashtray sitting on the table, and tossed it in with the countless other used butts, courtesy of Ms. Hanscome. They had long forgotten about it, after all. Then she repeated her question.

"You didn't answer me," she prompted teasingly, turning back to a still puffy-eyed but smiling Richie. "Who's the guy you like, hm? You gotta like someone!"

Richie blushed. He fucking blushed. He was never going to live this down. He shouldn't tell her, it would be stupid to do so. And yet, now that Bev had gotten him talking, he didn't seem to want to stop. Something about her just made him want to open up and tell her everything. She giggled at his reaction.

"Awwww, Trashmouth has a crush," she cooed.

"Shut up," he replied with a shy grin, only making her laugh harder. A pause, then-

"It's Eddie," he admitted quietly, barely loud enough for Bev to hear him. She gasped.

"Oh my goodness!" she exclaimed excitedly, clapping animatedly

beside him. "It all makes so much more sense!" Richie groaned.

"God, am I really that obvious?" he asked. Beverly laughed.

"Oh, no no no no," she reassured him with a giggle. "Just once you said it, I connected the dots." Richie smiled coyly. Beverly had never seen him so bashful before, and frankly, she found it refreshing in a strange sort of way.

Her smile dropped as she paused for a moment, considering what she was about to say. Richie gave her a quizzical look as his somewhat strained laughter fizzled out.

"Do you think you'll ever tell him?" she asked finally, and immediately regretted it. He looked completely thrown off guard by this, his eyes going wide, looking almost comically huge behind his ridiculously thick glasses. He started fidgeting nervously with his hands, his posture tensed dramatically, and his foot started tapping at a pace that would have been annoying if it were not for the situation at hand.

"I... I don't know," he finally responded slowly, eyes darting from his friend to the grass behind her. "I just don't wanna ruin a good thing, y'know? He's my best friend and I- I don't wanna lose that." Beverly let what he said sink in and gave a sad, sympathetic nod and smile. He was right, of course. Although she could never see Eddie reacting with disgust and hatred, not in a million years, one could never know, what with the AIDS epidemic happening... not to mention that Eddie had none other than Ultimate Bitch Supreme, Sonia Kaspbrak, as a mother, and no other parental figure in his life to balance the type of beliefs that were reinforced to him. Richie lowered his head slightly, his shaggy hair falling into his face. He looked more sad than scared now. Bev sighed sadly, and reached over to place a soft, comforting hand on one of his gangly, thin arms. He gave out a shaky breath.

"He could never hate you," she said in a voice barely above a whisper. "Never." She could feel tears teasing at the corners of her eyes, threatening to spill over if she had to look at her friend looking so broken for just a moment longer. His eyes were still red from crying and his cheeks still showed the tracks where tears had spilled

seemingly endlessly from his deep brown eyes. He took in another shallow breath as she said this, sniffling slightly.

“I know,” he responded, glancing up at her with flitting eyes and pursed lips. But she knew that he didn’t believe her.

“Richie-”

“I want to go back inside,” he said suddenly, standing up quickly and letting Bev’s hand fall from where it had been resting on his arm. He sniffled slightly, though he tried to mask it, and wiped his eyes vigorously with the sleeve of his sweatshirt. Beverly gave him a confused look.

“Are you sure?” she asked. He nodded.

“Yeah, I’m sure,” he responded with finality. He gave a watery, humorless laugh. “And besides, we’re missing the best part of Back To The Future.” Bev chuckled.

“They’re all good parts!” she exclaimed teasingly as she stood up, punching Richie playfully on the shoulder. Richie barked out a laugh.

“Oh really?” he asked with a genuine grin. “So you don’t remember all of the parts where he’s tryna fuck his mom, yeah?” Beverly laughed as she hooked her arm around his shoulder and they headed inside.

That night, Richie had been unable to sleep. He had never told anyone about his secret before, and he had never planned on doing so. He especially hadn’t planned on doing so while he was still in Derry. He rolled over uncomfortably in the warm sleeping bag that had been laid out beside the couch that Eddie was currently snoring softly on in Ben Hanscome’s living room. He could just barely see the clock by the light of the moon shining through the window. It read 5 o’clock in the morning. Jesus christ. He sighed irritably.

He could not stop thinking about Bev’s face when he told her that he knew that Eddie could never hate him. He saw that she didn’t believe him, and he saw the hurt in her eyes. He could practically hear her saying ‘Just because you hate yourself for it, doesn’t mean we will as

well.' But of course, Bev would never say that out loud.

He sighed again. It had apparently been louder than he intended, because it was then that he heard a rustling from the couch and the sharp intake of breath that came with someone waking up. Turning over, he saw Eddie sitting up and rubbing his eyes.

"Oh," Richie murmured awkwardly. "Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you up." Eddie just waved his hand dismissively at Richie as he stifled a yawn with the other.

"Iss fine," he responded, voice slurred slightly from drowsiness, and looked down at Richie through sleepy, hooded eyes. He gave a small smile, and layed back down on his side, facing his friend. "Can't sleep, huh?" he asked quietly, obviously not wanting to wake the others. Richie breathed out a small laugh.

"Yeah," he replied quietly.

"Did you have a bad dream?" Eddie asked softly. They all had bad dreams. A lot of bad dreams. Even though a few years had passed since they had fought the clown in the sewers, they were all still greatly affected by what they had gone through. Of course, Eddie and Richie in particular had always been best friends, but ever since their fight with Pennywise they had become practically inseparable. It had gotten to the point where Richie would crawl through Eddie's bedroom window practically every night after Sonia had gone to bed, and often he would stay until the early hours of the morning. Not even the other Losers knew about that. It was their little secret. So Richie always knew when Eddie had nightmares, and in turn Eddie always knew when Richie would have nightmares.

Richie sighed. "No, not a nightmare," he responded, surprised by how bitter he sounded. He wished that it was just a nightmare. Everyone had nightmares, and almost everyone had someone they could talk to about it. But not him. His was a nightmare that came about both day and night, one that he couldn't avoid, one that was crushing him, and one that he had never muttered a single word about to anyone until that night.

Eddie quirked his eyebrows and frowned. "What was it then?" he

asked, his voice tinged with concern. Richie was quiet for a moment, gazing at Eddie, his large doe eyes, his now-messy brown hair, and his pale skin that looked even paler when being illuminated by moonlight.

“I... I just can’t get comfortable,” Richie lied. He gave a small laugh. “Plus I’m too busy thinking ‘bout how I’m gonna do your mom next to have any time for sleep.” Eddie groaned.

“Beep beep Richie,” he griped, though it was free of malice, and he rolled over onto his back to stare up at the ceiling. They were both silent for a moment. “Hey, Rich?” Eddie asked finally, and there was an edge of uncertainty in his voice that slightly surprised Richie.

“Yeah Eds?” Richie replied. He smirked slightly when he heard Eddie grumble at the use of the nickname that he claimed to hate (though Richie knew otherwise).

“Don’t call me Eds,” he groused half-heartedly. “But really. Rich, do you ever... do you ever feel...” He seemed to be struggling to know what to say, searching in vain to find the right words to express what he was thinking.

“No Eds,” Richie joked with a straight face. “I never feel.”

“Shut up dickwad, I’m tryna think,” Eddie huffed at him in irritation, but he chuckled anyway. “No, I’m just... y’know, Derry isn’t really, well- ugh. Do you ever feel out of place here, Chee?” Richie was surprised and honestly bewildered by this question.

“Yeah, of fucking course,” he responded with a snort. “We’re losers. In Derry. What else should we fuckin’ expect?”

Eddie exhaled heavily out of his nose, having the nerve to look annoyed at him. “That’s not what I meant, Rich,” he said quietly, rolling back over to gaze at his friend on the floor. He propped his head up on his pillow with his elbow. Richie gave him a quizzical look.

“What d’you mean then?” he asked curiously. Eddie’s eyes searched his, looking for some semblance of understanding, but Richie was

unsure what he was supposed to be understanding. Finding nothing, Eddie lowered his gaze, a look of faint disappointment on his face.

"I mean... y'know what, you're right," he said suddenly, looking nervous. "It's nothing, you're right, we're just losers, that's all, and-holy shit, look at the time, we really need to get some sleep-" He was rambling again, talking so fast that Richie could hardly understand him.

"Eds-"

"We should really get some sleep, and don't fucking call me that, Rich, you know how much I hate it-"

"Eddie, what's wr-"

"Just, okay, goodnight Richie," he cut him off in a rather high-pitched voice, and flopped over onto his side so that his back was facing Richie and his face was pressed into the couch cushion. Richie just stared at his back for a moment, completely bewildered.

"I... okay..." he said in quiet confusion before turning over a well, with his back facing the couch. 'Well that was fucking weird,' he thought to himself. 'What's up with him?'

And with that, he finally fell into a fitful sleep....

And now they were at Bill Denbrough's house a month or so later, and Bev, being the sneaky little shit that she was, was making them play truth or dare.

Richie knew that it was bound to be a disaster.

Notes for the Chapter:

You can bet your ass that Beverly is supportive in canon and no that is not up for debate.

3. Blue Moon

Summary for the Chapter:

Eddie and Richie finally get together :')

Enjoy <3

“Blue Moon, you saw me standing alone, without a dream in my heart, without a love of my own. Blue moon, you knew just what I was there for, you heard me saying a prayer for someone I really could care for. And then there suddenly appeared before me, the only one my arms would ever hold. I heard somebody whisper ‘please adore me’, and when I looked, the moon had turned to gold. Blue Moon, now I’m no longer alone, without a dream in my heart, without a love of my own.”

-The Marcells, “Blue Moon” (1961)

“My baby may not be rich, he’s watching every dime, but he loves me, loves me, loves me. We always have a real good time, and maybe he sings off-key, but that’s alright with me... ‘Cause every time he pulls me near, I wanna cheer ‘let’s hear it for the boy!’”

-Deniece Williams, “Let’s Hear It For The Boy” (1984)

Richie knew that his friendship with Eddie wasn’t exactly... normal, per se. Especially not for the time they were living in, and especially not in the small, conservative town of Derry. Richie knew that best friends didn’t cuddle, especially not male best friends, and especially not during the AIDS epidemic----

“You see that, Richard?” he remembered Mrs. K tell him one time when he was over at the Kaspbrak house. He was there to drop off Eddie’s schoolwork on a day that Mrs. K had deemed him too sick to attend (though it was more likely than not that Eddie had merely sneezed once and she had nearly suffered a heart attack, convinced that her son was dying). Richie had entered the home and was about to start walking up the staircase after letting himself in. Mrs. K had called from the comfort of her recliner that the door was unlocked.

She was far too engrossed in her soap opera to be bothered enough to stand up and answer the door. She glared over the rim of her glasses at where he stood in her front hallway, one flabby hand grasping the TV remote and the other holding a bowl of ice cream.

“What am I supposed to be seeing, Mrs. K?” he asked, biting back a snarky response and forcing his lips into a strained smile, hoping that he came across as more polite than rude. But Eddie’s mother had never liked him, and she wasn’t about to start now.

Mrs. K gave an exasperated sigh, rolling her eyes and pointing a thick, sausage-like finger at the TV that was against the wall that Richie couldn’t see from the hallway. Taking this as his cue to walk over, he did, though rather begrudgingly. His backpack was getting painfully heavy on his back with both his and Eddie’s work in it. Once he was in front of the TV (with Mrs. K’s recliner behind him), he looked at what she was pointing at, but what he saw was nothing unusual. It wasn’t unusual, no, but the way that Mrs. Kaspbrak had made a point to show him... it made him sick to his stomach.

It was the local news channel, and an attractive blonde reporter in a tight red dress was sitting behind the news desk and green scene made to look like a cityscape. The scrolling headline at the bottom of the screen read: ANOTHER YOUNG LIFE TAKEN BY AIDS, THIRD IN DERRY. The reporter was informing the viewers of the boy, Martin Connoly, who had been 18, still in his senior year of high school. He had died two days prior in the Derry hospital. A victim of AIDS.

Richie had known him. He had been in both his English and algebra classes. He and his other classmates had known him as “Marty”.

“You know, Richard,” Mrs. K started from behind him, but he didn’t turn to face her. He didn’t want to see the look of contempt on her face. “That gay disease was sent by God. You know this, don’t you? He’s punishing them for their sins.” Richie let out a shaky breath as both anger and fear coursed through his veins.

“Why are you telling me this, Mrs. K?” he asked stiffly. She was silent for a moment.

“It’s just a warning, Richard,” she responded rigidly. “A warning that

all the boys your age should be getting.” Richie nodded numbly. He couldn’t tell if she suspected him or not, but he knew that if she truly, in her heart of hearts, thought that he was gay then he wouldn’t have even been there in her living room. She would have already thrown him out of her home by the seat of his pants and wasted no time placing a restraining order on him for herself and her son. “Now go take his homework to his room, my Eddie Bear needs to keep up in school.”

Richie didn’t mention the talk with Sonia Kaspbrak to Eddie when he finally made it to his room----

So yeah, his relationship with Eddie wasn’t usually what people deemed ‘platonic’. Best friends didn’t usually hold hands, kiss each other on the cheek, or flirt. Best friends didn’t feel their chests flutter almost painfully when the other complimented them, and they sure as hell didn’t jerk one out to the thought of their best friend.

So now they were in Bill Denbrough’s living room, with Mr. and Mrs. Denbroug out of town, and the hour nearing 1 a.m.

“Come on, Truth or Dare guys!” Beverly exclaimed, clapping her hands together. “Come on, get in a circle!” This earned her groans and complaints from her friends, but they complied anyway. So now they were all sitting with their legs-crossed and settled a tight circle on the center rug of the living room.

“Who wants to go first?” Ben asked, obviously trying to conceal his excitement. He was just as into this sort of thing as Bev was, but he was a boy, and he had always been told that he shouldn’t. Richie sympathized with that. He wasn’t supposed to like boys or Madonna, yet here they were...

‘God, they’re perfect for each other,’ Richie thought to himself about Ben and Bev, with a sense of bitterness that he wished wasn’t there as he slouched against the coffee table. They were allowed to be perfect for each other. Beverly was a girl and Ben was a boy. Richie would never have the same thing granted to him, and as happy as he was for his friends that they had finally gotten together after so many years of intense pining, he was still jealous.

“Stan should go first!” Bev decided, which Stan responded to with a groan and a slight shake of his head, making Bev chortle. “Come on Stan, truth or dare?” Stan gave a heavy sigh, but didn’t object as he sat up straighter from where he was situated across from Richie.

“Truth, I suppose,” he replied with an air of resignation and a slight roll of his eyes. Leave it to Stan to never pick dare. He didn’t trust his friends with such a responsibility, and rightfully so. Bev gave him a mischievous look, and Richie had to suppress a laugh. Bev always came up with the best questions.

“Okay, so Stan,” she started, smiling in a way that made Stan obviously uneasy. It was all in good fun though, and they all knew it. “What’s the most illegal thing you’ve ever done?” This pulled a very dramatic groan from their friend, at which the others couldn’t contain their laughter.

“You guys just wait,” Stan promised, pointing a threatening finger at his friends. “You just wait, you guys will have the worst questions.” And with that, he joined in with his friends’ laughter.

And so it went on like that for a few turns. It went from Stan, to Bill, to Eddie, and then Mike. And Mike decided that now was the right time to pick on Richie. Mike gave him a smug look, and Richie quirked his eyebrow in a jokingly intimidating way. “So, Richie,” Mike mused, feigning indecision. “Truth or dare.”

“Dare,” Richie responded without hesitation. Mike thought for a moment.

“Alright,” he said finally. “Then I dare you to strut for us in Bill’s mom’s red stilettos.”

Richie griped but he did it. As he walked (or more accurately, stumbled) through the kitchen in Mrs. Denbrough’s 5-inch wine red stilettos, nearly twisting his ankle and having to hold onto the kitchen counter for support, he had to remind himself that this was much better than giving Bev what she wanted and answering “truth”.

A few rounds later he wasn’t so lucky, though.

“Come on Chee, you’ve gone with dare every time!” Eddie whined dramatically as he leaned his back against the base of the couch. Mrs. Denbrough’s heels were lying next to him, since he had been forced by Bill to have a go in them as well. It was both a surprise to Richie yet not one at all when Eddie was much better at walking in them than he was.

“So what?” Richie retorted.

“So? It’s getting boring, Richie,” Eddie replied, crossing his arms.

“Yeah, well y’know what’s not boring? Fucking you m-”

“Beep beep, Richie,” Eddie cut him off irritably. “Come on, just do truth for once!”

“Yeah, come on Rich!” Bev encouraged him. “Give us all of your deep, dark, juicy secrets.” She giggled, along with the others.

‘Yeah, fat chance,’ Richie thought to himself. ‘Not when you’re asking me the question, Beverly dahling.’ But he knew that he wasn’t going to get out of it. He was going to be forced to pick truth whether he liked it or not.

“Ugh, fine!” he consented finally, throwing his arms up in a dramatic show of defeat. Beverly grinned.

“Alright,,” she began with an impish grin. “Is there anybody that you, Richard Trashmouth Tozier, like?” Ah, there it was. The question that Richie had dreaded, yet knew was coming. He felt himself turn cold and he shot a glare at his friend.

“I’m not fucking telling you who I-”

“I didn’t ask who, Richie,” she laughed. “I just asked if there was even someone at all.” Oh. Of course.

‘Beverly, you sly little shit,’ Richie thought to himself. He groaned.

“Come on, Bev my darling, you know that I’m already taken-”

“Don’t you dare asshole-” Eddie tried to cut him off.

“-by Eddie’s mom, and you know how happy we are together.” Eddie sighed in exasperation while the others tried to conceal their laughter. He shot Eddie a boyish, toothy grin, and Eddie only rolled his eyes and smirked humorously in return.

“Come on Rich, there’s gotta be somebody,” Ben urged him eagerly. Mike, Bill, and Bev nodded in encouragement, and Stan quirked his eyebrows as if challenging him to fess up who the subject of his affection was. Only Eddie stayed quiet. Richie could feel himself going red and he saw the looks of surprise, curiosity, and victory on his friend’s smug faces.

“Ugh!” he cried and covered his face in his hands, amidst his friends good-natured laughter.

“Yes!” Beverly cried in victory.

“Aw, R-Richie has a c-c-c-crush,” Bill stated with a chortle. Richie pulled his knees to his chest, stuffed his face into them, and flipped Bill off. His friends only laughed louder.

“So who is the Mrs. Trashmouth?” Stan asked playfully. Richie felt himself freeze up. It was lucky for him that his friends still couldn’t see his face. He knew that Stan was only joking, and that he had no way of knowing that it wasn’t a Mrs. Trashmouth, but rather a Mr. Trashmouth. He wasn’t angry with Stan, he could never be angry at Stan, but it rubbed him the wrong way nonetheless. He looked up, and saw Bev giving him an apologetic look. He just shook his head slightly at her, telling her that it was fine. Then he cracked a smile that he hoped didn’t look as forced as it felt.

“I would dare to say it’s none of your fucking business, my dear sir,” he replied cockily in his terrible British accent, sending the others into fits of laughter. Everyone but Eddie.

Eddie had stayed relatively quiet. He had laughed, sure, but not like the others. He looked almost... uncomfortable? Disappointed? Richie wanted to ask him what was wrong, but was distracted again by Stan, who was armed (as always) with one witty retort or another.

“I didn’t even know that you were capable of love, Richie,” Stan

joked.

"Oh, c'mon, don't be mean to him," Mike scolded him lightly, but smiled nonetheless.

"So w-w-ho's the not-so-lucky l-l-ad?" Bill asked once the laughter had died down a bit. Richie felt another pang in his chest. How had he not seen this part coming? How had Beverly not see this coming? He glanced over at her, and saw that she wore an uncomfortable, increasingly apologetic look. He gave her a small smile back to reassure her that he wasn't angry. Though a small part of him wanted to be angry. She had pushed him out of his comfort zone, and not in a way that helped him (or rather, not in a way that he understood at that time, but one that he would come to know later). But really, he could never be mad at Bev.

"Dare I repeat myself, Big Bill?" he asked with a grin. "I already told you-"

"None of your fucking business," Bev joined in with her best imitation of Richie's shitty British accent. The two of them laughed.

It took a few minutes, but eventually the others gave up.

And so it was now 4 o'clock in the morning yet again, and Richie was unable to sleep. His thoughts were running wild, and he found himself unable to quell them or sort them out.

His biggest question was on Beverly's motives. Why had she done that? If others had found out, it would have been a catastrophe. Why would she have put him in that position? He wasn't sure, but he also knew that she would never hurt him intentionally. He rolled over and shifted uncomfortably in his sleeping bag. He was sleeping on the floor, per usual, and Eddie was in a sleeping bag on the floor next to him, instead of on the couch, though he wasn't in it now. He had gotten up, presumably to use the bathroom.

It felt almost unbearable to be so close to him, yet to be so far at the same time. But he also knew that he should enjoy the close proximity while he still could. Eddie would find out eventually, and things would only go downhill from there. Richie was resigned to this fate.

'Don't touch the other boys, Richie,' a malicious voice in his head would taunt. 'Nobody wants to touch a dirty boy, a faggy boy, a sissy boy. Nobody wants to touch a queer boy...'

Richie took in a wavering breath. He wished that he could say that he had gotten used to these sort of self-loathing thoughts, but if he were being honest with himself, he knew that they continued to hurt him more than he could ever show.

The sudden flickering of the porch light outside being turned on pulled him out of his thoughts. He could see the glow through the window by the door that sat across from the living room where they were all now sleeping (Stan's snoring was growing unbearable). He shimmied out of his sleeping bag and stood up, using the edge of the coffee table as leverage. Then he made his way over to the door, treading lightly and snaking his way around the others who were spread out across the floor. He wanted to know who the hell was outside and turning on the porch lights at 4 o'clock in the fucking morning.

Finally by the door, he glanced out the window that sat adjacent to the door, and saw that the mystery person was Eddie. His brows furrowed in bemusement. What the hell was he doing out there by himself? It was fucking freezing! The bastard didn't even have a jacket on! So with that in mind, he turned the knob and opened the door as slowly and quietly as he could, though it still created a loud groan that resonated in his ears, sounding much louder than it likely was. Startled, Eddie whipped around.

"Whoa, it's just me," Richie assured him, his voice tinged with humor. He joined his friend on the porch, shutting the door behind him, and immediately regretted not grabbing his sweater. "Shit Eds, it's fucking cold!" Eddie relaxed, and rolled his eyes.

"Not my name, dickwad," he said with a faint chuckle before returning to leaning against the railing of the porch. He sighed and stared wistfully out at the starry sky and the pale, glowing moon past the tree line. "Just came out here to get some fresh air." Richie watched him for a few moments, as if in a trance. He was enamored, that was for sure. He loved all of the little things about Eddie, from the light freckles that dotted his pale cheeks, to the way strands of his

usually well-kempt hair fell into his eyes when his hair was messy. He loved him, but he knew that he shouldn't. He knew that it was supposed to be dirty (it didn't feel dirty), and he knew that it was supposed to be wrong (it didn't necessarily feel wrong). In fact, it felt like he was meant to love Eddie. He knew this, and yet he couldn't help himself.

"Can I tell you something, Rich?" Eddie asked suddenly, still gazing at the cloudless, star-filled sky above them. Richie gave him a puzzled look.

"Yeah," he replied after a moment, clearing his throat. "What's up, buttercup?" 'Stop calling him nicknames, Richie!' he chastised himself right after the words left his mouth. 'He's gonna catch on and then you're gonna be in deep shit!' But Eddie didn't comment on it. He never did.

Eddie stayed silent for a moment, and Richie was starting to think that maybe he had forgotten the question altogether, until he finally spoke up.

"It's kind of..." he started, and Richie was startled to see that his voice was wavering and watery, and his eyes were starting to show the tell-tale signs of the arrival of tears. "It's... just please don't hate me, Richie." Richie was completely bewildered by this. What could Eddie have possibly done to make Richie hate him? What in the world could ever-

Oh.

This was a rather familiar thought, wasn't it?

"I could never hate you, Eddie," he responded in a voice softer than anything Eddie had heard from him before. Eddie lowered his head finally, squeezing his eyes shut, body tensing as if he were about to start full-out crying at any moment.

"R-Richie," he started again, voice cracking and tears starting to roll down his cheeks. He took in another stuttering, shaky breath. "I'm gay."

Richie was stunned to say the least.

Eddie? Gay? It was laughable! He was dreaming! This was the sort of shit that happened to straight couples in TV shows, not to closeted gay kids in small conservative towns, and especially not to Richie Tozier. No, it was completely ridiculous, and soon enough he would wake up and none of this would have happened. Eddie would still be sleeping in the sleeping bag beside him, and he would still have his fantasies about girls that normal boys had. The ones that Richie wished that he himself would have. And one day, Eddie would get a girlfriend, and then he would get himself a wife, and hell, maybe they would have a kid or two. Richie could settle for being best man. Maybe he'd even be "Uncle Richie" one day. But there could never be a "Richie and Eddie", there could never be R + E.

"Richie, please say something," Eddie pleaded after a few moments of silence, sounding desperate and about ready to break into sobs. The broken, lost look in his eyes nearly broke Richie's heart. He shook his head quickly, dragging himself out from his reverie.

"Ok," was all that he could choke out. Eddie looked as if he had been slapped across the face.

'Wrong move, Tozier.'

"Ok? That's it? Is that all you're going to say?" Eddie cried. Richie knew that he was being too loud, but he wasn't about to tell him to be quiet.

"N-No Eds, I-"

"Don't fucking call me Eds!" he practically yelled, and immediately burst into tears.

'Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuckety fuck,' Richie thought to himself frantically. He hurriedly placed his hand on Eddie's shoulder, and held on tight even when Eddie tried to jerk away. He could barely stand seeing Eddie crying, and he hadn't seen him cry this hard since his mother had told him in a fit of rage that his father would have been ashamed to have seen what he had become.

This had been after around a week of fighting about the placebo pills that she had been forcing down his throat ever since his father died. Eddie had come running to the Tozier house, and Richie's mother had let him in without a second thought (she always let him in. She liked having him around, she thought that he was a good influence on her beloved troublemaker son). He had dashed into Richie's room, flung himself onto Richie's bed, and cried himself dry into the fabric of Richie's old Cyndi Lauper t-shirt (something that very few people knew that he owned).

"S-So are you just gonna stand there o-or punch me a-a-a-lready," Eddie choked out between sobs. Instead Richie immediately enveloped him in a tight hug, and soon enough he had tears of his own streaming down his face. And after a moment of shock, Eddie returned the embrace in full strength.

It took a minute or so for him to calm down, but eventually he did. He pulled away from his friend, sniffling and wiping his eyes. "S-sorry," he muttered.

"I..." Richie started, suddenly hesitant and unsure. 'Jesus, Tozier, pull yourself together! He just came out to you for fuck's sake!'

"Me too."

Eddie gave him a confused look. "You're sorry too?" he asked, perturbed. Richie shook his head quickly, feeling stupid.

"Ah, no, I mean, me too," he tried again, but was only met with more perplexion. He was starting to feel agitated. "I mean... I mean I'm gay too." Eddie's eyes widened almost comically, and Richie might have laughed if it weren't for the small detail that he had just admitted his deepest secret to the person he least wanted to find out. Some small part of him thought that Eddie would start to laugh at any moment now. That he would say it was all just a prank, and call Richie a faggot just like Henry Bowers and his goons did. But of course he didn't.

"You know how earlier while we were playing truth or dare I was kinda... off?" Eddie asked carefully. Richie had no idea what that had to do with anything, but answered anyway.

“Yeah, I actually did,” he responded slowly. Eddie smiled sadly.

“I was jealous,” Eddie admitted.

“What?” Richie asked, and felt dumb immediately after saying it.

“I was jealous,” Eddie repeated, staring up at him with a level of intensity and vulnerability that Richie had never seen before. “When you said that there was someone... And Stan started asking who the girl was... I was jealous because I wanted so badly for it to be me.” Richie was shocked, to say the least.

“But mostly I was unhappy ‘cause it felt better when we weren’t talking about your love life,” Eddie continued, sounding tired and defeated. “If we didn’t talk about it then I didn’t have to fully acknowledge the fact that you were gonna get a girlfriend one day and I’d have to face the music.” He suddenly gave a sharp laugh. “I never planned on telling you all of this, but here we are I guess.”

‘How would he react if I told him that everything he just said is exactly how I felt?’ he thought to himself, feeling dazed. ‘I must be fucking dreaming.’ But he knew that he wasn’t dreaming because the tear stains on his cheeks felt too real, and the cold air on his bare arms and face was too cold to be merely a figment of his imagination.

“I can’t fucking believe you,” was what came out instead of whatever comforting or romantic thing he should have said. He felt unreasonably angry, not at Eddie, but at the world. Eddie looked shocked for a moment.

“Wh—”

“I’ve literally been dealing with all of that shit since we were 13!” he practically yelled. “I used to cry myself to sleep half the fuckin’ time, and I was so scared that anyone would find out! I carved our initials into the fucking Kissing Bridge for fuck’s sake!” Eddie stared at him with a completely stunned expression.

“Really?” he asked softly. Richie took in a deep, calming breath.

“Yeah,” he responded. “Really.”

They stared at each other with amazed expressions for what could have been seconds or hours. Neither of them knew nor particularly cared.

“Does anyone else know?” Richie finally asked. Eddie sighed.

“Bev does,” he answered. “Only ‘cause she said she basically knew already and asked me about it.”

Oh my god.

“Holy shit!” Richie exclaimed, and was suddenly laughing his ass off.

“What?” Eddie asked, alarmed. “What’s so funny?”

“Bev, you sly little shit!” Richie practically shouted, still laughing.

“What are you-”

“She knew about me too!” A look of realization dawned on Eddie’s face and suddenly he was laughing as well. “She knew and that’s why she pulled that shit in truth or dare!”

Soon enough their laughter died down and they were gazing at each other fondly amidst residual laughter. It was quiet for a moment, before-

“Can I kiss you?” Eddie asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Yes,” Richie croaked in response, his heart hammering in his chest.

So he pulled Eddie closer, leaned down, and pressed his lips to the other’s. And despite being shrouded in the darkness of night, Richie had never felt more free.

“So does this mean that I have to break things off with your mom?”

“Do you ever shut the fuck up?”

Notes for the Chapter:

chef's kiss reddie.

4. There Could Never Be a Mother Who Loved Her Son More Than I Love You

Summary for the Chapter:

Richie comes out to his mother, who is very sweet and supportive, because I am literally so soft for a supportive Maggie Tozier.

“I believe the light that shines on you will shine on you forever. And though I can’t guarantee there’s nothing scary hiding under your bed, I’m gonna stand guard like a postcard of a golden retriever, and never leave ‘til I leave you with a sweet dream in your head. I’m gonna watch you shine, gonna watch you grow. Gonna paint a sign, so you’ll always know, as long as one and one is two, there could never be a father who loved his daughter more than I love you...”

-Paul Simon, “Father and Daughter” (2002)

“And now my life has changed in oh so many ways. My independence seems to vanish in the haze. And every now and then I feel so insecure. I know that I just need you like I’ve never known before. Help me if you can, I’m feeling down, and I do appreciate you being ‘round. Help me get my feet back on the ground. Won’t you please, please help me?”

-The Beatles, “Help!” (1965)

It was now 10 months after that night on the front porch of the Denbrough’s home, and Richie Tozier was the happiest he had been in years. Eddie and him had been going strong, hit every base imaginable, and had even managed to keep their relationship a secret from their parents. Well, most importantly, they had kept it a secret from Eddie’s mother, which was surprising considering that Richie snuck in through Eddie’s bedroom window practically every night.

Though Richie’s parents had found out eventually, and it went about as well as Richie could have hoped.

His mother had confronted him one day as he had arrived home from

school.

“Richie, dear, is that you?” she had called from the living room as her son shuffled inside, tossed his backpack carelessly on the floor beside the front door, and dropped his house keys on the hardwood floor with a clank and a mutter of “fuck!” under his breath. Maggie Tozier smiled fondly. Her Richard was never one for subtlety.

“Yeah Mom, it’s me,” he called back, kicking off his shoes and making his way to the entranceway of the living room where his mother was sitting on the couch with her legs tucked under herself, reading that week’s newspaper. She glanced at her son over the rims of her reading glasses and set the newspaper down on the coffee table. Glancing at it, Richie saw that the main headline, printed in bold, was about Bill Clinton’s victory in the presidential election. Not that Richie particularly cared about politics. He knew that he probably should, seeing as that he would be a registered voter in only a year or so (“You’ve got no excuse not to exercise your right to vote, Richard,” his parents would always tell him), not to mention the fact that his rights as a gay person were reliant on politics. But he quickly pushed those thoughts out of his mind. It hurt to think about it. It made him feel angry and hopeless.

“How was your day, honey?” his mother asked affectionately. Richie shrugged noncommittally.

“It was fine,” he replied, per usual. Maggie nodded in response, also per usual. They rarely had any particularly deep or meaningful conversations anymore.

So with that, he was about to head into the kitchen to grab a snack (“Hell yeah, Doritos here I come!”) when his mother called to him again.

“Richie, honey, can you come here for a second?” she asked, and something about the tentativeness of her voice made him uneasy. He complied anyway. He was never one to deny his mother anything. Despite feeling more detached from his parents as of late, his mother was still an incredibly important person to him. He walked back over to her, and as he stood in front of her she gently took his hands into her own. She smiled softly.

“Mom?” he asked with uncertainty. “What’s wrong?” She took a deep breath.

“Sit down,” she offered. So he did. So he sat himself next to her on their overly-cushy couch, feeling tense and nervous while she continued to hold his hands.

“You know,” she started. “I know you better than you think.” Richie barely suppressed the urge to scoff.

‘Oh, you don’t even know the half of it, Mama.’ His mother laughed, as if able to read his thoughts.

“I know what you’re thinking, baby, and I’m sure that there’s plenty of things I don’t know about you,” she continued with a sad smile. “You’re growing older and soon you’ll be moving out, going to college, starting your own career...” She shook her head, as if ridding herself of the thought. “But the thing about mothers is that they can tell when there’s something going on with their child. Well, good mothers that is.” She chuckled. “Richie, I can tell that there’s been something weighing you down, I’ve known for years. And I’ve noticed that you’ve seemed happier lately, but I can still sense it there, and...”

Richie gulped and felt himself grow cold.

“Mama...” he started, and Maggie was taken aback by how small and scared he sounded.

“Baby, it’s okay,” she reassured him. “It’s okay.” She paused for a moment. “Richie, I have a big question for you, and I want you to answer me honestly, okay?”

‘Oh my god, holy fuck, holy shit, oh my god-’

“Honey, are you gay?”

And he burst into tears. Maggie immediately pulled her son into a tight embrace, rubbing his back and kissing the crown of his head as he nodded into her shirt.

“Y-yeah,” he confessed, voice muffled by his mother’s sweater. “I-I-

It's t-t-t-true." Maggie just hugged him tighter.

"I know."

It took a few minutes, but eventually he calmed down, left only with hiccups, sniffles, and sore, red, puffy eyes. He pulled away from his mother, but she still kept a comforting hand on his arm. All was quiet for a moment albeit his deep breaths.

"How did you know?" he asked finally. Maggie smiled softly.

"A mother always knows," she responded. He gave her an incredulous look, and she laughed. "Honey, I think I've known since you were a little boy. But my suspicions were basically confirmed when you entered your pre-teen years and you were practically pulling at Eddie's pigtails every damn chance you got. You were all over him, baby, and you still are." Richie blushed at this and she laughed again.

"And besides, you always talked about 'smashing pussy' and all that—" Richie made a face- "and it was quite obvious to me that you were compensating for something. And when I noticed that, I started to notice the way you looked at boys versus the way you looked at girls and well... I knew something was there. And I could tell that you were hurting because of it, but I didn't know how to approach you about it. I wanted you to come to me on your own terms, but well... I guess I got tired of waiting." They both chuckled at this. It was silent for a moment as Richie digested all of this.

"And you're okay with it?" he asked nervously. His mother smiled.

"You can't control who you are, sweetie," she replied as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

'The people in town could learn a lesson or two from her,' Richie thought bitterly.

He grinned. "So does that mean that you'd be okay if I told you I was dating the one and only Eddie Kaspbrak?" he asked her. His mother's eyes widened and then she beamed.

"You are?" she asked eagerly. Richie nodded happily in response.

“Oh, that’s wonderful!” she exclaimed. “You know, he’s such a wonderful boy, so sweet and polite and a real good influence on you, my dearest problematic son, and-”

“Mom, mom, chill out,” Richie laughed, feeling almost as light as he did the first time Eddie kissed him. Maggie chuckled and smiled at him before pulling him into another hug. He rolled his eyes jokingly, but hugged back anyway.

“I’m gonna go get a snack now,” he announced as he let go of his mother and stood up, straightening out his t-shirt with his hands and adjusting his glasses on the bridge of his nose. “There’s an unopened bag of Doritos that are calling my name.” Maggie chuckled.

“Of course,” she replied. “And who are you to refuse them?” Richie laughed.

He hesitated for a moment, before turning back to his mother.

“Love you Mama,” he told her sheepishly, feeling rather embarrassed but sincere. Maggie gave him a knowing smile.

“I love you too, baby.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Catch me busting an uwu over soft Tozier family dynamics.

5. Dear God

Summary for the Chapter:

Sonia Kaspbrak finds out. She confronts Eddie about it. Shit blows up and Eddie escapes to the Tozier's house. Richie is a good boyfriend and Maggie is there to protect her boys.

"Did you write the book of love, and do you have faith in God above if the Bible tells you so? Do you believe in Rock n' Roll? Can music save your mortal soul? And can you teach me how to dance real slow? Well, I know that you're in love with him 'cause I saw you dancing in the gym. You both kicked off your shoes, man I dig those rhythm and blues. I was a lonely teenage broncin' buck with a pink carnation and a pickup truck. But I knew I was out of luck, the day the music died..."

-Don Mclean, "American Pie" (1971)

"Dear God, sorry to disturb you but I feel that I should be heard loud and clear. We all need a big reduction in amount of tears. And all the people that you made in your image, see them fighting in the street, 'cause they can't make opinions meet about God..."

-XTC, "Dear God" (1986)

It was around a month after Maggie found out (and subsequently, Wentworth, who had already had his suspicions that his son wasn't into girls, and met the news with the same amount of support as his wife) that the worst happened.

Sonia Kaspbrak found out.

Richie and Eddie had been doing pretty well. They only cuddled and kissed (and occasionally other, more intimate activities) in Eddie's room at night while Sonia was fast asleep in her bedroom or in the recliner downstairs, or at sleepovers at Richie's house, and occasionally on hang-outs with the Losers, who were all aware of their relationship and were supportive. They mostly got teased when

they kissed around the other Losers, but of course, that's what friends are for, right? However, that never stopped them from cuddling on movie nights. And of course they still bickered, but it was always that same half-hearted, affectionate back-and-forth that was so very them.

But the shit hit the fan one day in late March, 1993, towards the end of their senior year of high school. They had already submitted their college applications, and had actually been accepted to the same college. One in California. As far away from Derry, Maine, as they could get. They had both received their acceptance letters (automatic admission for both of them due to their outstanding GPAs), and could not have been more excited to leave their hometown and start their lives together. They only had to get through 3 or 4 more months before they could ditch this town for good. They were on the home stretch, and could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Unfortunately, those 3 or 4 months turned into Hell on Earth for the two of them, and it was because of one measly, careless mistake made by the hands of Eddie Kaspbrak.

They didn't have many photographs of the two of them in a romantic way. Sure, they had a million and one group photos with the other Losers, but photos with only the two of them? Those were special. They didn't want to have too much damning evidence for Sonia (or anyone else, for that matter) to find. Though they did have a couple, and they did their best to hide them as well as they could.

Eddie had one drawer in the desk in his room that he was able to lock. It was a secret drawer, one that you could barely notice since it was located on the opposite side of his desk, the side facing the wall, and even if his mother figured out that it was there, well, it was locked, wasn't it? Sure, it wasn't the most fool-proof of systems, but it had worked thus far and it had been nearly a year, after all.

The picture was one of those thin strips of four photos that you took in the picture booth at the arcade. The first miniature square photograph on the strip hidden in Eddie's drawer was just of them smiling at the camera (not suspicious). The second one was of them smiling at each other with utmost fondness (suspicious). Then Richie kissing Eddie's cheek while Eddie hugged him (Damning for Richie). And the last one was of them kissing on the lips (damning for both of

them). Eddie was rather fond of those photos. He liked how happy and in love they looked.

The thing was, he had taken them out to look at them on a night when Richie was unable to come over. Taking it out wasn't unusual. Forgetting to lock the drawer and accidentally leaving it slightly ajar when he put it back was, though.

It was no secret that Sonia Kaspbrak liked to snoop, especially when it came to her beloved son. Occasionally she would go through Eddie's room, checking under his bed, rummaging through his dresser drawers, as well as the drawers on his desk. It was on a Tuesday morning when she was going through her son's belongings that she noticed something peculiar. There was a small drawer on the back side of her son's desk, one that she would not have noticed if it had not been for the fact that she was leaning over to check behind his desk and it was open ever so slightly. She "tsk"ed lightly as she pulled the desk away from the wall so that she could reach it, and opened the drawer with her pudgy fingers. Looking inside, she saw what appeared to be the backside of one of those picture strips that you took in picture booths. Curious, she picked it up and flipped it over, and what she saw nearly stopped her heart.

Her Eddie was kissing that Tozier boy.

That dirty Tozier boy who she had always had vague suspicions about.

That filthy Tozier boy who had infected her precious son.

She felt tears rush to her eyes as unbridled rage coursed through her body. She couldn't believe it! Her son? One of them? Absolutely not! There had to be some sort of explanation. It wasn't her boy's fault, no, not at all. It was that Richie Tozier's fault, him and his horrible sickness, one that she dreaded had been spread to her poor son. Eddie wasn't really like that. He was just confused, that was all.

That's what she tried to tell herself at least.

As much as she wanted to deny it, and as much as she was absolutely repulsed by the mere thought of it, it was just as Maggie Tozier had

said; a mother always knows. Sonia Kaspbrak had always known that her son was different. She knew but she didn't want to know. But now she had been forced to face it, and she couldn't have been more devastated.

Eddie returned home at 3:30 that day. Richie had walked him home, per usual, but had to part ways with him at the corner before Eddie's street. Mrs. K wasn't too fond of him, after all, and likely wouldn't be too pleased to see Richie walking her son home every day ("like a couple of fags" he could hear her say). They didn't want to take any chances.

They waved goodbye to each other, and promised to see each other later (meaning that Richie would be climbing in through Eddie's bedroom window that night). They couldn't do much more than a friendly pat on the back by way of goodbye in broad view of Eddie's neighbors. It would be disastrous if the neighbors found out. They'd report right back to Sonia. So they said goodbye and Eddie walked the short distance to his home in high spirits, completely unaware that in only a few short minutes his cheerfulness would be crushed like an empty beer can.

He opened the door and stepped inside of his home, taking off his shoes carefully and hanging his backpack neatly on the coat rack beside the door. Looking up, he saw his mother sitting at the kitchen table.

"Hi mommy," he called to her, unsure if she had noticed him. As much as he didn't want to talk to his mother, he knew that she would throw a tantrum if he didn't. He also knew that if he didn't call her "mommy" she would throw an equally outrageous tantrum. Sonia Kaspbrak had mastered the art of guilt tripping, after all.

His mother didn't answer for a moment. He started to get a bad feeling in his gut. 'What the hell is up with her?' he thought nervously.

"Eddie Bear, will you come here for a moment?" she asked, her voice a type of calm that Eddie had never heard before. Frankly, it scared him. But he walked over anyway.

Once he reached her, she finally looked up at him, and to his surprise and confusion he noticed that her eyes were red, presumably from crying.

“Mommy, what’s-”

“You’d never lie to your mother, would you Eddie Bear?” she asked him suddenly, gripping one of his slim hands in her thick, clammy ones. Her grip was too tight for his liking.

“W-What?” he asked, and his gut was screaming at him that this wasn’t good, that something bad was about to happen.

“You wouldn’t lie, Eddie, would you?” she asked again, tears starting to form in her eyes. “You would never do that to Mommy, right?” Eddie felt frozen. Something was off. Something was very off.

He gulped. “O-Of course not,” he responded, more shakily than he intended. His mother stared into his scared eyes with an unyielding gaze.

“I’ve noticed that you’ve been hanging out a lot with that Tozier boy lately,” she said suddenly.

Oh no.

Oh god no.

Eddie felt as if he had lost the ability to breathe.

How could she have found out? How could she have known?

“Of course, he’s one of my friends,” he replied, trying in vain to sound as calm and even as possible.

“And I see how he’s all over you-”

Oh fuck.

“Richie’s just affectionate Mommy, it’s not like that-”

“And I’ve heard some pretty nasty rumors about him, Eddie, that

he's... he's homosexual, that he's dirty."

"They're not true, Mommy, Richie's not-"

"Eddie Bear, you said that you'd never lie to me!" she cried shrilly. "I know that that Tozier boy has infected you!"

"I have no idea what you're talking about!" Eddie cried out in distress, trying to tug his arm away from his mother's grasp, but her grip was too strong.

"Then what is this?" she shouted, whisking a strip of paper out of her breast pocket and slamming it down onto the table in front of them.

It was the pictures from the picture booth.

Eddie was silent for a moment, opening and closing his mouth stupidly like a fish out of water. "Mommy, I-"

"Eddie Bear, I know you're not one of them," she whispered in a watery voice, tears streaming down her face. Tears that she had obviously conjured up to make her son feel guilty. "He's infected you, but it's alright, we'll fix you." Eddie was silent for a moment.

"He loves me," he says quietly. His mother looked as if she had just been stricken.

"What did you say?"

"I said that he loves me!" Eddie shouted, suddenly filled with rage. How dare she talk about Richie like that! His mother laughed shrilly.

"Of course he doesn't love you!" she cried as if he had just said the most preposterous thing in the world. "You're talking nonsense! A boy can't love another boy the way that a girl-"

"Stop!" Eddie cried in both rage and fear as he started to cry, trying in vain to pry his mothers clamped hand from his wrist. "Stop,

“Mommy, please!”

“Why would you do this to me?” she sobbed. “Why would you hurt Mommy like this?!”

“I’m sorry, just please let me go!” Eddie all-but screamed, full-on crying by then.

“Why would you ever think that you liked boys-”

“I just do, I just do!” he screamed back.

“No you don’t, you’re just confused Eddie-”

“No I’m not, I’ve always known-”

“He’ll never love you the way-”

“Yes he does, and I love him too!” he screamed. Sonia fell silent.

“No you don’t,” she said in a deathly quiet voice. “You’re just confused, Eddie Bear.” Eddie was breathing heavily.

“No,” he responded shakily. “I don’t think I am.”

“Why would you do this to me?” she whispered, tears cascading down her cheeks like waterfalls. “Why would you ever choose to be like this?”

“I didn’t,” he replied simply. “Now. Let. Me. Go.” In her shock, she had loosened her grip on his arm, and without a second thought he pulled himself free and sprinted out of the house. He didn’t even bother to grab his bike. Instead he just ran and ran, barely comprehending his mother’s screams of “faggot!” as he left (something that she would tearfully apologize for later, but something that he would never forgive her for). He ran all the way to Richie’s house and knocked frantically at the door. Maggie answered.

“Oh Eddie, what a lovely su-” she started, but then saw the state of complete distress he was in. She was startled, to say the least. “Eddie, honey, what happened?” she asked, alarmed. He took in a deep, shaky breath, trying his hardest not to start crying again.

"Can I go see Richie, please?" he asked in a voice that was as even as he could manage. Maggie stared at him for a moment with confusion and worry before nodding.

"Sure, sweetie," she replied slowly, stepping aside to let him through the door. "He's up in his room." Eddie nodded by way of thanks and immediately barreled up the stairs to Richie's room. Opening the door without even bothering to knock, he saw Richie lying on his bed with his headphones in, listening to the music on his walkman at full volume. It was probably Madonna, though he would deny it. He would probably insist that it was something much more punk than that, perhaps like Nirvana or Guns N' Roses. But Eddie knew him better than that.

Richie obviously hadn't noticed him enter his room, so he called out his name. "Rich?" he called, voice starting to crack. 'Crap, don't start crying again,' he thought to himself. "Richie?" He finally looked up and gave a surprised but rather pleased look to see his boyfriend standing in his doorway.

"Eds!" he cheered, sitting up hastily as he pulled off his headphones and tossed them onto the bed beside him. "What brings you to my humble ab—" And then he noticed how distraught Eddie looked, and his eyes were immediately filled with concern. "Woah, what happened dude?" he asked worriedly as he pushed himself off of the bed and met Eddie halfway across the room to pull him into a hug.

Eddie could barely choke out any words before starting to bawl into the other's shoulder, arms wrapped tightly around his boyfriend's waist and hands gripping the back of his shirt as if it were a lifeline. They stood there wrapped in a tight embrace for what felt like an eternity but couldn't have been any longer than a few minutes. Finally Eddie pulled away, sniffling and wiping his aching eyes with the hem of his shirt. Glancing back up at the other, he noticed the look of pure and unadulterated worry that was contorting his features. His eyes were wide and his brows were raised, and he looked more serious than Eddie had ever seen him in his life.

He didn't like seeing Richie like that.

"It's my mom," he whispered finally, his voice cutting through the

thick silence like a knife. His eyes flitted back and forth from Richie to the carpeted floor.

“What did she do?” Richie asked softly.

As much as Eddie would deny it, he didn’t like it when Richie was quiet. It just wasn’t him. It meant that something was wrong, really wrong, and it scared him.

“She-” he started, and felt himself start choking up again. ‘God dammit!’ he thought in frustration. He took in a deep breath, trying to calm himself. He had just cried himself a river a moment ago, and he wasn’t about to start back up again. “She found out, Rich, she fucking found out.” He watched as the other’s face turned ghostly pale, eyes wide and mouth ajar, trying in vain to piece together what to say through his own shock.

“W-What?” was all he managed to get out.

“I said she found out, and now she’s gonna- she’s gonna-” he rambled in distress, but then cut himself off abruptly as a realization dawned on him.

He had no idea what she was going to do.

Would she kick him out? Unlikely, but one could never know about Sonia Kaspbrak.

Would she call over a priest? Have him sent to one of those gay conversion camps? This was more likely than the aforementioned, but it was also unlikely that she’d want him out of her suffocating sight.

Would she make him stop seeing Richie? Most definitely. His friends? Probably.

But really, he didn’t know and it scared him shitless.

Richie’s parents would protect him though, right? They liked Eddie, and they had reacted quite well to the news that their son was gay.

But of course, if Sonia wanted to get him, she had the law on her side. There wouldn't be much that Mr. and Mrs. Tozier could do.

"Eddie?" came Richie's voice, pulling Eddie out of his daze. "Eddie, what-"

"What if she comes for me, Rich?" he asked, panicked. He clutched onto his boyfriends shoulders with a grip so tight that it was likely to bruise. "Oh, she's so gonna come for me, and she's going to be so mad, oh I'm in so much trouble Richie, what am I gonna do, what are we gonna do, I mean, she-"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, breathe Eds," Richie urged him, gently prying his boyfriends hands off of his shoulders and clasping them in his own, larger ones. There was no quick-witted retort of "That's not my name, dickwad!" There was only the sound of Eddie starting to hyperventilate and Richie's futile attempts to calm him. "It's okay, it's gonna be okay, we're gonna be okay, just please-"

"Boys?" Maggie's muffled, worried voice came from behind the closed door. "What's going on?" Eddie only started to panic more. Maggie obviously noticed. "Alright, I'm coming in whether you like it or not," she announced decisively, and opened the door. Upon seeing the scene before her, her eyes widened and she rushed over to them, pulling them both into a tight hug. At this, Eddie started crying again. 'This is the third time in the last hour, dumbass!' he scolded himself. Maggie didn't seem to care though.

"Honey, please just tell me what's happening," she asked in a soft, comforting voice as she guided both of them to sit on the edge of Richie's bed while rubbing Eddie's back in soothing circles. But Eddie couldn't manage to get any words out, or at least not any coherent ones, reducing him to a blubbering mess that only got the shoulder of Maggie Tozier's t-shirt wet with his tears.

"Mrs. K found out," Richie responded for him in a low, defeated voice as he shuffled through the drawer of his nightstand, searching for one of Eddie's spare inhalers. Eddie felt Maggie tense as Richie passed the inhaler to him and he took a desperate puff.

"How?" she asked after a moment.

“I-” Richie started. “I don’t know.”

Eddie sniffled and raised his head, looking at both of their worried faces through puffy, red eyes.

“She saw the photo booth pictures,” he croaked out through his aching throat. A look of recognition dawned on Richie’s face.

“But don’t you keep that drawer locked?” he asked. Eddie nodded.

“Usually,” he responded glumly. “I suppose I just... forgot.” It was silent for a moment.

“Well Went and I will make sure that when she shows up she won’t..”

She won’t get you.

“Thank you,” Eddie said softly, coughing slightly to try to clear his throat. “But how?...”

“We’ll talk to her, don’t you worry,” Maggie responded, and she said it with such certainty that Eddie was tempted to believe her. But he suppressed the urge to scoff. If his mother wanted something, Heaven be damned if she didn’t get her way, and she wasn’t about to let Maggie and Wentworth Tozier get in the way of her and her son. But instead of saying this, he just nodded. Maggie patted the two of them on the back one more time before leaving, giving Eddie a soft, sad smile right before closing the door behind her.

It was quiet after that, but soon enough Richie scooted over to Eddie and wrapped him up in his arms. Eddie welcomed the hug, resting his head in the crook of his boyfriend’s neck. He sighed, finally done crying, and layed down, taking Richie down with him. He chuckled slightly.

“At least let me take you to dinner first,” Richie joked halfheartedly, earning himself an equally halfhearted kick in the shin.

It only took Eddie about 5 minutes to fall asleep, despite the fact that it was only 4 o’clock. The events of the last hour had exhausted him both mentally and physically. He had still been wearing his shoes and jacket, and yet the heaviness of his heart and the warmth of his

boyfriend holding him close made his eyes slip shut and his mind turn off.

According to Richie's bedside clock, it was 5:30 p.m. when he finally woke up. He was awoken by Richie rustling beside him, sliding his arm out from where it had been slung around Eddie's waist, and was now sitting up, staring out the window at the setting sun. Eddie yawned and rubbed his eyes, noticing that they were incredibly dry and sore from all the crying he had been doing earlier.

"What are you doin'?" Eddie asked, voice slurred from lingering sleep. Richie glanced over his shoulder to look at him.

"Oh," he responded with a playful smile, though he looked equally tired. "Just thinking 'bout how..." Eddie knew that he had just cut himself off from a joke about fucking his mom, and Eddie appreciated it greatly. He didn't want to hear about his mother at that moment.

He didn't want to think about what had happened.

What would happen.

What she had done to him...

... What he had done to her.

Because he felt guilty, he really did. He could hear the voices of Richie and the other Losers telling him that it wasn't his fault, that she's a bitch, and that she has always been terrible to him. Yet he still couldn't shake the constant feeling that he was disappointed in her. That he's made her mad. Or sad. That whatever it was, it was his fault.

Maybe if he'd just tried harder to like girls.

But he shook his head, ridding himself of the thought. He didn't like girls, but it wasn't for lack of trying. Because he had tried. He had tried with all of his might to look at girls the way that the other boys did. He just couldn't see what was so great about them. Sure, he loved to have them as friends, but never in a million years could he imagine himself being intimately involved with one. And once he truly came to the realization that he didn't like girls the way he

should, and that he never would, he cried himself to sleep for a month straight. What would his mother think? What would the Losers think? What would the people at his mother's church think? What would the kids at school think?

But then Richie came, armed with a confession akin to his own, and he finally felt at peace with himself. Well, truthfully, it was still a battle, but it had become so much more bearable. He had someone that was there to fight the battle with him.

And now he was about to have that taken away from him.

Oh god.

The two of them were quiet for a moment, just gazing at each other. Eddie felt as if this was the last time he was ever going to see Richie, despite Maggie's promise. Knowing his mother, it wouldn't even be out of the question to move. She would even stop him from going to college with Richie, or at least she would try to. So Eddie wanted to etch his face into his memory, the way that the setting sun cast a golden glow across his thin cheeks which were dotted with freckles, and how his curls were so tangled and unruly after getting out of bed. He wanted to remember his eyes and his smile and everything else about him, down to the smallest detail.

'You're being dramatic,' Eddie thought to himself. 'It's not going to be that bad.' But he felt like it was, and that was all it took. He felt as if he were mourning already, and nothing had even happened yet.

That was when they heard shouting downstairs. Eddie jolted up, and was about to run downstairs until he thought better of it. It was his mother's voice that he heard yelling, and Maggie's voice yelling back (with the occasional input of Went).

"Your son did this to my precious—"

"Ha! Please, Sonia, my son didn't need to do anything."

"Are you insinuating what I—"

"Your son is about as straight as a circle, ma'am, and I could have told you that years ago!"

“How dare you say such a thing!”

“I’m only stating the truth!” Maggie cried. “Only the truth! You’ve have to have had some idea, Sonia, you-”

“And why would I think anything of the sort about my Eddie?!”

“Because a mother always knows.”

Things were silent for a moment, at least from what Richie and Eddie could hear through the door of Richie’s bedroom.

“Well, this mother surely didn’t!” came Sonia’s shrill voice a moment later. “And I didn’t because it is simply not true!” Maggie barked out a laugh.

“Eddie didn’t need any help from Richie, he was always like t-”

“No he wasn’t! He wasn’t! I’ve always known that there was something different about your son, that he was dirty, but I never thought that he could ever infect my-”

“Infect?! He didn’t infect anyone! It’s not some sort of disease, it’s-”

“Wentworth!” Sonia called out in distress, cutting Maggie off. “You’re really alright with having a fairy son? You’re really okay with the fact that you’ve basically had a girl-”

“I have a son,” Wentworth replied, in a voice far calmer than that of his wife or Sonia Kaspbrak. “And he’s a son who I love dearly and want to be happy. But apparently you don’t seem to share that sentiment, Mrs. Kaspbrak.” Eddie could practically see his mother’s face turning a bright shade of red, and steam blowing out of her ears.

“How dare you-”

“Oh, but I do dare,” Went replied pleasantly, which only seemed to aggravate Sonia more. “And Eddie will be staying here.” It was deathly silent downstairs as Eddie and Richie held their breaths, until-

“You think you can just tell me what to do with my son?!” Sonia bellowed, her voice seeming to shake the entire house. Eddie winced and Richie put a comforting hand on his back. “He’s my son, and I-”

“He’s 18, is he not?” Went asked. Silence fell again.

“What does that have to-”

“It means that legally he is an adult.”

“But-”

“Not to mention the fact that you have been coming up with illnesses that he has for practically his entire life-”

“That was just to protect him-”

“-which is both illegal and morally wrong.”

The silence that followed felt far louder than any screaming could have.

“So if you wouldn’t mind, Mrs. Kaspbrak, I would like you to leave my house. You’re making quite a scene, and we are trying to make dinner.”

And to Eddie’s immense surprise, he heard the front door get thrown open and slammed shut, and as he rushed to the window he saw his mother storm down the driveway and squash herself into her car and speed off.

Perhaps the law was on his side after all.

The pure power of the relief that overtook him almost made him fall over on the spot. He started grinning once his mother’s car was finally out of sight, and turned to see Richie laughing so hard that he could hardly breathe, clutching his stomach as he fell back against the door. With that, Eddie started laughing too.

Maggie heard the boys laughing from upstairs and smiled as she

watched Sonia Kaspbrak leave. It felt as though they had won a battle of sorts. She turned to face her husband, who sat tiredly on the couch, but wore a soft smile.

“They’re going to be okay,” she stated. It wasn’t a question, it was a fact. Went nodded.

“They sure are, Mags. They sure are”

Notes for the Chapter:

Sonia Kaspbrak is a bitch and that's the tea sis. Sorry,
I don't make the rules, I just enforce them :/

6. Epilogue: Time After Time, We Belong

Summary for the Chapter:

Final chapter y'all!

Richie and Eddie finally in college in California in their own apartment. Richie tells Eddie that they're going to get married one day. Eddie agrees.

"If you're lost, you can look and you will find me, time after time. If you fall, I will catch you, I'll be waiting, time after time. If you're lost, you can look and you will find me, time after time. If you fall, I will catch you, I'll be waiting, time after time. Time after time, time after time..."

-Cyndi Lauper, "Time After Time" (1983)

"I swear to fucking god, Richie, if you track mud into this apartment I will make you sleep on the couch," Eddie groused irritated as he stood in the doorway of their small Los Angeles apartment, his hands resting on his hips as he watched Richie untie the laces of his mud-caked boots. It had been raining that day, and all of the dust that had built up over the dry weeks had turned into mud, and poor Richie always walked to and from his after-school job every day.

"Okay, mother dearest," Richie responded in another one of his Voices.

'And this is the bastard that I settled for?' Eddie thought to himself, but smiled anyway. "Shut up, fuckwad, or you won't get any ice cream tonight."

"You would never!" Richie gasped in mock offense, his hand reaching up to clutch his chest as he stood up and kicked off his shoes, which landed with a small thud on the mat next to the door. Eddie only smirked. "Eds, darling, you wound me!"

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," Eddie laughed dismissively. "Just take your

socks off, I can smell them from here.” Richie saluted him and did as he was told as Eddie walked back into their home.

It was small, that was for sure. It had one bedroom, a bathroom, and a joint kitchen and living room, but it was all that they could afford off-campus.

But it was theirs, and they couldn’t have been happier.

Eddie walked into the kitchen and stood in front of the stove, stirring their box mac ‘n’ cheese that was now boiling in a pot with a wooden spoon. Suddenly he felt a warm body pressed up against his back, and a pair of lanky arms wrap around his waist. He chuckled and rolled his eyes.

“Hello Richie.”

“Hello Eddie Spaghetti.”

That earned him a light elbow in the gut, which Richie merely laughed off.

“Have I ever told you how cute you are?” Richie asked.

“Yes,” Eddie replied with a fond roll of his eyes. “Every day. Since we were 10 years old.” Richie grinned as Eddie continued to stir their food.

“I love you,” he said softly. Eddie smiled.

“And I love you,” he said back with a kiss to the top of Richie’s head, which was resting on his shoulder. ‘God, when did we get this mushy?’ Eddie thought to himself, yet he couldn’t bring himself to care. After all the shit they’d gone through, from what his mother had put him through throughout his entire childhood, to Henry Bowers and his goons, to fighting Pennywise the Dancing Fucking Clown, he deserved this.

“You know, I’d marry if I could,” Richie said suddenly. Eddie stilled for a moment, but soon relaxed.

“I know,” he replied softly.

“I’d take you to the courthouse this fucking second if I could.”

“I know,” Eddie whispered again. “I would love that. I would love that so damn much. But we can’t, and you know that.”

“But one day we’ll be able to,” Richie stated, and he said it with such certainty and confidence that Eddie nearly believed that Richie truly did know it for a fact. “And once that happens it’ll be all over for those bitches that said we couldn’t.” Eddie laughs, and so does Richie.

“Is this your weird way of proposing to me, Richie?” Eddie asks with a light laugh, only half joking as he finally turned to face his boyfriend properly, who still kept ahold of his waist. Richie smirked.

“I dunno, perhaps,” he replied slyly, at which Eddie sighed in fake exasperation.

“Ya know, there are more romantic ways to do it, Rich,” he chastised in jest. Richie gave him a boyish grin.

“I know.”

“Well, if you want your answer, it’s a yes,” Eddie says as he turned back to stirring the mac ‘n’ cheese.

“Huh?”

“When we’re able to get married,” Eddie repeats, trying to have the same amount of confidence as Richie did on the matter. “My answer is yes.”

The joyful grin that covered Richie’s face made everything that they had gone through worth it. He let go of Eddie and started jumping up and down excitedly like a little kid.

“Oh, you’re so gonna regret that, Spaghetti,” he whooped. Eddie laughed.

“Yeah, I probably will,” he responded, and they both laughed.

But he didn’t, and he never did.

“We belong to the light, we belong to the thunder. We belong to the sound of the words we’ve both fallen under. Whatever we deny or embrace for worse or for better, we belong. We belong, we belong together.”

-Pat Benatar, “We Belong” (1984)

Notes for the Chapter:

And that's all folks.

Author's Note:

I'm sorry.